

# VITRIAN SECRETS

## Onslaught 1 (The Prequel)

Dele Andersen

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Editor – Tamara Hart Heiner

Cover Design – Mibllart

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## **Dele Andersen**

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## **Dele Andersen**

Onslaught 1 (A Prequel to Vitrian Secrets)

Onslaught 2 (A Prequel to Vitrian Secrets)

## **Part 1 – Eradicate the Chosen**

# Chapter 1

Late snow continued to fall on the cold Norwegian night in early March. Tranquility reigned in Celina's winter home. The house stood alone at the top of the mountain, a reasonable distance from the next inhabited house.

Voices woke Celina around three in the morning. She got up and walked out of her room.

Some distance away, at the end of the hallway, she could hear faint voices. No one should be here. She'd been told to leave the Vitrian fortress and self-isolate in the mountains while her husband was away. She tip-toed to the end of the hallway and placed her head against the door, careful not to make a sound. A familiar man's voice echoed inside the room, a voice she had known from childhood, someone she had trusted and confided in. Her mouth fell open as she heard the words being discussed. For years she'd been plagued by visions of children being captured or killed. It was one reason the Vitrians banished her.

It seemed those visions had just become real. *What a traitor! What a traitor!* Celina thought.

"Now is the time to do it," the traitor said.

"Are you sure, sir?" a woman's voice asked. It sounded like one of the daughters of Odd, but it was hard to tell in her exhausted state. Odd was a known sorcerer, and fear gripped Celina.

"There will be no going back," the woman continued. "She will be distraught when she wakes and can't find her son."

"Vent, you and your sisters said it's the only way to get what I want. I need to get rid of The Chosen." The traitor's voice tilted upward as if seeking affirmation. *Vent?* Shock went through Celina's body. Nothing good came out of Vent or her family. Celina needed to act fast.

"But you don't know who The Chosen child is," Vent said. "We can wait a few more years, can't we?"

"No!" he shouted. "I will get rid of all the children with similar traits now. Get it done. By the time Celina wakes up, I want it done—" His voice broke off.

Celina backed away from the door. Her heart palpitated faster than she thought possible. She understood what they were planning. She knew if she did not act fast, she would wake in the morning without her little boy next to her. She moved quickly to the room where Adrian was sleeping. She picked her son up and ran. Pandemonium took over Celina's existence as she hurried down a flight of steps in her pajamas, sweating profusely and panting with Adrian

in her arms. The cold weather didn't keep her from sweating.

"What is it, Mama?"

Adrian, still half asleep, stared as Celina placed him down on the floor at the entrance to the house. She picked up her winter jacket by the door. She placed her Praying Méndez into the jacket and tried to open the door. Her hand shook as if she had an intense fever.

Fear crept over Adrian's face. "Why are we going out? We should go back," he said.

Celina ignored her son, knowing he couldn't understand what was about to befall him. She closed her eyes and murmured, "Help, God, help!" She opened her eyes and turned the doorknob again, but it didn't move.

"Oh, God!" She tried using her slim body to force it open.

Her son screamed. She spun around to see a woman had snatched him up.

"No! No!" Celina screeched like a wild animal and rushed toward the steps.

A man stepped in front of her, preventing her from reaching Adrian.

"Can't you see that even your prayers are not being answered?" the traitor scorned in the dark. His face and upper body were hidden by the shadows, but the dim lighting revealed he had on a pair of long, light brown trousers. "If they were, you would never have

come. I had this planned long before now, and you cannot stop it."

"No, no," Celina said. "You are crazy, you're a traitor. I trusted you with all I had . . ." She hit him with her hands, but her fists had no impact on his broad chest. "I beg you, don't do this." The words gasped out amid uncontrollable tears.

"Yes, I am a traitor. You are lucky, Celina. I won't burn you along with Adrian."

Celina raised her head in horror. Before she could react, the traitor pushed her aside; she staggered backward and hit the wall.

"Adrian is only a little boy. He knows nothing of the Vitrian prophecy." Celina pleaded for her child's life.

"Celina, you'll have other children."

He looked back, his lips curving like he was going to smile. Celina could read between the smiles. She wondered how she could have missed this and loved, trusted the menacing face her whole life.

"I won't give the other parents this option. I will kill them before I have their children."

"You can't prove Adrian is The Chosen one, can you?" Celina said.

"Adrian has the traits of The Chosen in his blood, and that's enough for me. The Chosen and those with traits of The Chosen must die."



The venom in his voice shocked Celina. How had he become so cold? She had loved him as a teenager. He had always been her supporter and confidant. She could not believe this was happening.

She suddenly remembered Claudios, the former spiritual leader of the Vitrian fortress. He had warned her, but she hadn't believed this time would come. The traitor stepped into the room he'd come from.

"Don't do this!" Celina rushed behind him, and the instant she stepped into the room, her heart fluttered in desperation.

Adrian floated in mid-air, still dressed in his pajamas. A big circle was drawn on the floor beneath him, and in the center of the circle was a pentagon with several other symbols within it. A bluish light radiated from the circle to the roof of the room, the only light in the room.

"Sorcery." Celina's eyes widened in disbelief. "She has poisoned your mind; this is not you! You cannot trust her or her family!" Celina pointed at Vent, dressed in a long red cloak.

## Chapter 2

Celina's heart palpitated fast, but her medication made her weak. The Vitrians said she only had visions because she was sick. They gave her drugs before she came to calm her nerves and make her rest.

"Mama," Adrian cried. The little boy struggled to get free. He could only shake his body where he hung in mid-air.

Celina rushed toward him, but a force a few inches from the circle pushed her back.

"Don't! Don't!" She shook her head and looked at the other woman in the room, desperate to save her child from whatever they were planning.

"Sir." Vent looked up.

"There shall be no more Chosen prophecy. I shall put an end to it here, now . . . even if it means ending my own lineage." The traitor looked at Vent with a determined gaze. His eyes flashed like a man possessed. "Do it!"

Vent opened her palm, and a stone-like object appeared. She spoke in what sounded like an ancient language, and fire erupted from the item. The fire burnt upward out of Vent's palm.

"No." Celina screamed and rushed to stop whatever evil Vent was consulting. Whatever the stone was doing wasn't anything good.

The traitor caught Celina and threw her back. She fell to the ground, bruising her legs and hands as she slid to a stop by the door. She ignored the pain from the bruise and the laceration on her skin. Horrifying dismay filled her as the traitor took the stone from Vent and threw it.

Celina screamed. The stone burned with unusual dark fire as it moved in slow motion toward the circle where Adrian was trapped. The entire area around Adrian turned into flames. Adrian cried with his full strength as the dark fire burned.

Celina pushed up and rushed again to the circle, but the force around it prevented her from getting to Adrian. She hit the shield, shouting aggressively, but nothing happened. Celina turned to the traitor in a wild rage and flung herself at him, ready to tear him apart. The huge man pushed her away, and she wailed as she fell to the floor, collapsing like a bag of bones. Celina shrieked, hitting the invisible shield again and again.

"I want Marcus' daughter, Wanda," the traitor said to the cloaked woman, ignoring Celina's wailing. "And let's not forget Zacharie's granddaughter, Mia. Take care of them all."

Their faces and expressions were still hidden away in the dark. Celina could hear them through her howling, but she already knew what he had planned—to destroy The Chosen children. If he could do this to Adrian, Celina knew he would stop at nothing to destroy The Chosen children one after the other.

“I’m on it,” Vent said. “What about Luciana’s son, Haakon? I mean, Zacharie’s other grandchild. I know though you have differences, she is still dear to you.”

“Luciana? She’s been faithful.” The traitor paused. “Include Haakon. Meet me in the city when you get your strength back.” He turned and walked past Celina. “I have other children to get to this night.”

Celina continued to beat her fists upon the shield long after they left. She sobbed as silence descended upon her.

She wobbled toward the door of the room, the room where she first heard the traitor and Vent speaking. She could no longer bear the scene. She sat down on the floor just outside the door that led to her room and the staircase that went down to the living room. She couldn’t hear Adrian anymore, only the sound of the burning fire. She covered her ears, squeezed her body together on the ground with her knees bent toward her face, and wailed bitterly.

Marcus’ little daughter came to mind. Celina searched frantically for her phone.

"Marcus, Marcus!" she gasped out when he answered.

"Celina?"

"He . . . he . . . did it," Celina sobbed amid bitter tears. "He killed Adrian . . . burned him alive!"

"What?" Marcus' voice rang out sharply.

"He is searching for the Chosen child and any other children who shows traits of The Chosen," Celina said. Tears gushed like heavy rain from her eyes. "You have to get your daughter away, get Wanda into hiding . . ."

"Wanda!" Marcus repeated. "Wanda is safe—"

Marcus broke off, and Celina heard the cry of a baby through the phone. She knew it could only be Marcus's daughter, Wanda.

At the same moment, a weird noise came from behind her. She turned to face the room where Adrian had been. She looked through the door and screamed in fear.

"Celina, Celina!" Marcus shouted, but his voice didn't register anymore.

Something else was in the room. Celina could not believe the red-eyed creature before her, ready for the kill.

Celina swallowed hard. The fire must have consumed Adrian and unleashed a never-before-seen demon from the Abyss.

The creature took a step and leaped. It crashed through the door frame and stood in front of Celina. She squealed in trepidation and lowered the phone in her hand. Marcus' voice tittered from the speaker.

## Chapter 3

Marcus stopped outside Wanda's bedroom when Celina squealed on the phone. His wife, Sofia, pushed past him.

"Celina. Celina!" Marcus looked at the phone in his hand. What was going on? Another scream followed, but this time, it was Marcus' wife. Sofia ran out of Wanda's room, carrying their little daughter in her arms.

A massive, seven-foot bat-like creature stepped out of the room, breaking through the wall. Its wicked eyes focused on Marcus, Sofia, and then Wanda.

Marcus could see from his Vitrian training that the eyes of the creature were locked on his little daughter.

"The Night Furfur!" Sofia shouted the name of the beast.

Before it moved, Marcus pulled from the wall beside him a huge machete with an image of the Vitrian symbol engrafted on it. The symbol would bring healing to humans but death to demons. The symbol sparkled as Marcus launched at the beast.

"Marcus," Sofia cried out. Wanda started crying.

The Night Furfur opened its mouth wide, revealing huge fangs as Marcus launched at it. Marcus ducked the massive wing the demon swerved at him, raised his knife up, and tore the wing as the knife cut through like a pair of scissors cutting through a piece of cloth pulled tight. The demon went after him with the other wing, but he ducked and slid toward the horse-type legs of the creature. An experienced Vitrian, he knew the weakness of the Night Furfur was its back, where the talons and fangs could not protect it. The demon kicked Marcus with one of its legs before Marcus could get a good position behind it. Marcus fell backward and rolled around on the ground, avoiding the talon that pressed toward him. He grabbed his knife and knelt. The beast struggled as one of its cut wings wobbled on the floor.

"Call Xavier," Marcus said, pulling back toward his wife, his eyes still on the demon.

"What should I tell him?"

"I want to know how many Vitrians are under attack," he said, looking straight at the thing struggling to move in front of him.

"You think this was planned?" Sofia said. "You promised me we'd be safe, Marcus. You promised me demons don't attack Vitrians."



"This is unusual." Marcus turned to his wife and saw the panic on her face.

"Is Wanda safe?" Sofia asked. "I don't want my daughter mixed up in the Vitrians' stories or their dead and forgotten prophecies."

"This is not the time—"

"Is she safe?" Sofia shouted, her eyes filling with tears. "I'm not a Vitrian! I can't protect her like you!"

"No," he said, closing his eyes. "I am sorry. I didn't foresee this. I didn't believe Celina."

"Celina?" Sofia said. Her eyes narrowed. "We agreed you'd keep away from Celina, but now she's calling you in the middle of the night."

"Take it easy, Sofia." Marcus tried to focus on her while watching the demon struggling to crawl toward them. "Celina just lost her son."

"Adrian?" Sofia froze. "Adrian is . . . dead? I don't believe her . . . She's just trying to draw you in and get you away from me. Why didn't she call Bathe or Xavier or Alexis? Or she could even have called Tine or Luciana. Instead, she remembered to call you?"

"Sofia—"

A sound from the Night Furfur had them turning back to it.

"What's it doing?" Sofia breathed, staring at the deformed creature making rather irritating sounds.

Marcus didn't bother answering his wife. He pulled her by the arm and rushed toward their room.

“What's happening?” Sofia stared at the demon struggling in a pool of its own ichor and screeching in an unknown language. “What is the Furfur doing?”

“It's calling for assistance. It knows it can't finish me alone. We need to take Wanda to a safe place.”

“What! More are coming?”

“Yes, and we need to save Wanda!” Marcus answered.

## Chapter 4

Time ceased to exist in Celina's world as she stood motionless, watching the humongous thing in front of her. Adrenaline raced through her body, driving out the horror of what had just happened to Adrian. She backed up until her back hit the wall behind her. Fire burned everywhere, different from the dark flame invoked on Adrian. This new fire radiated from the tall and massive creature as it bent to fit into the room. Only its red and angry eyes showed clearly in the flames. Gray hair with a bluish-white tint covered its entire body, glowing faintly in the firelight.

Where had it come from? It must have something to do with the dark fire Vent summoned on her son. The mysterious element must have raised a powerful and unknown demon from the Abyss.

Its angry deep red eyes narrowed in on Celina. Smoke from the fire lingered on its body, fading away little by little, but the creature didn't burn, even though the room was engulfed in the blaze. The burning smoke evaporating from its body didn't seem to bother it.

The creature suddenly roared and jammed its face toward Celina. She shrieked. She jerked out of her stupor as the creature roared. She needed to run if she was to stay alive and find a way to get her son back.

She ran down the hallway and jumped down the steps until she got to the lower level. She went straight for the door she had struggled to open earlier.

Celina heard the creature breaking through the wall behind her. She turned briefly and saw the creature crouched to leap over the stairs.

Celina screamed and tried the door handle. This time, the handle turned, and the door opened. She ran into the woods, her unzipped winter jacket flapping in the wind. She weaved as she ran, her knee-length silk nighty rippling. She heard the creature behind her as it crashed through the wooden wall and door of the house.

The beast rushed after her, but Celina didn't stop. She ran farther and farther into the woods in the thick darkness of the Norwegian winter. The sound of branches breaking and cracking followed behind her. She didn't feel the cold of the winter's night, instead she was sweating profusely as she ran.

Trees parted with every single push the monster made, waving its massive hands and knocking the trees down like little sticks. The creature leaped.

Celina stopped running. Time slowed down as she watched the beast jump several feet above her. It

landed about ten feet in front of her. The mountain resonated with a thud as the creature hit the ground.

## Chapter 5

Celina didn't feel the cold, and the only thing she could think of was the beast standing between her and her life. Why did it want her dead? Why had it run after her with such intense fury? No one would hear her scream on the mountaintop. The nearest inhabited house was too far away, and her voice would be lost in the wild winter wind. She stepped back, sweating and panting from the run through the woods. All her senses fixed on the creature. She knew if she ran, it would land in front of her, pick her up with its very large hand and squeeze the life out of her.

She'd never seen anything like it before. Her hand dipped into her jacket, touching the Praying Méndez she'd grabbed when trying to escape with Adrian. It glowed through her pocket, but not as brightly as it would if she had dedicated her time to prayer. Weak prayers meant an inadequately charged Praying Méndez, making her easy prey for demons. Celina's troubling visions had left her disturbed enough to affect her praying life.

"I command you to go back to your home; back to the Abyss," Celina commanded as she brought out the Praying Méndez.

The creature groaned. It stepped back, covering its eyes with its massive hands. The supernatural glow affected the creature, but Celina expected more. Demons were supposed to dissolve and go back to the Abyss when commanded by a Praying Méndez. But this creature did not disappear. Celina took two steps closer to it.

"Go, I command you, back to the Abyss. That is where you are meant to be." She raised the Méndez up, slightly above her head, so it was in the creature's line of sight.

The creature roared. Shock gripped her, and goosebumps erupted on her entire skin. She heard the fury in its roar. She'd never heard of a demon withstanding the command of a Praying Méndez. She looked at the instrument in her hand. What was wrong? Was this because her prayers had been sporadic and weak lately? But as long as there was light in a Praying Méndez, it should work. Any demon facing it should disintegrate.

The creature moved its leg back one step. The slight movement gave her courage. She lifted the Praying Méndez again.

"I bind you to this boundary. You shall not cross it." The glow of the Méndez would not last all day

because of her inadequate prayers; nonetheless, she would wait it out until the Méndez was out of light.



## Chapter 6

Marcus could see his wife was engulfed in fear. She was not a Vitrian but became engulfed in the Vitrian ways when she married him.

"Are more demons coming?" she asked again.

"Yes, Sofia, more demons are coming. That sound was a call for help from one Night Furfur to another," Marcus said. He rummaged in a drawer. "I need to get my Praying Méndez and some Vitrian weapons."

"What are we going to do?"

Marcus looked up briefly. His wife's face was distorted with fear. She was not a Vitrian by birth, had not been trained to fight beasts. Until now, she had never seen a real Night Furfur.

"I will protect you, trust me. But first thing is, we have to leave this place. Everything traces us back to this house. We have to get out of here now." Marcus' hand closed on a thin cone made of wood and silver. He lifted it from the drawer.

"Your Praying Méndez," Sofia said.

He pulled out other objects made of silver with the Vitrian symbol on them. The supernatural symbol, consisting of a thin cone with two snakes wrapped around it and wings at the top, glowed whenever a demon was present.

Marcus concentrated on the objects, and they shrank in size., making it possible to conceal the weapon within his jacket.

“To the car! More demons will be here in a few seconds.” Marcus pulled his wife toward the door. He grabbed Sofia's and Wanda's jackets and threw them over their shoulders. His wife looked at him with an expression of confusion and anger. He had promised her before their marriage that a demon would never attack them.

It had never happened before.

Marcus took hold of his own jacket and placed the shrunken objects into the elastic hooks inside. He was about to put the jacket on when the sound of a heavy object landing on the rooftop startled him. Sofia shrieked and pulled Wanda close to her body. The child began to cry, clinging to her mother.

Marcus wasted no time thinking about what it might be. He pushed the door open and pulled his wife and daughter out behind him. A creature landed in front of them on the newly fallen soft snow.

Marcus jerked out his Praying Méndez. A supernatural, heavenly light emanated from the

Praying Méndez, blinding the demon. The demon cried and crumbled as it tried to move back.

"I bind you," Marcus said. His voice carried deep confidence. He knew what was to happen. "I bind you and order you back to the Abyss, your home."

The demon grunted as the unquestionable order took effect. It began to fight with an unseen power that bound its wings and body tighter and tighter. Within seconds, the Night Furfur disappeared.

Marcus shoved Sofia and Wanda into the car. He squealed out of the driveway as snowflakes fell from the sky. Sofia kept turning back to check on little Wanda in the car seat.

"I'm dropping you off at the old church building down the mountain!"

"Dropping me off . . . and where will you be going?" Sofia said.

"I'll be luring the demons away."

He felt her eyes on him as he kept his gaze straight.

"What if a demon attacks us or your daughter? What will I do? I don't know how to fight them!"

"They won't look for you there. Sofia, you know this is not an ordinary place; it is a place of protection. The demons won't even see you once you step into the compound. The entire area around there has been sanctified. No demon can see the area, let alone enter it."

"You're leaving us because you want to go to Celina." Sofia stared at him. "I can't believe I thought you had nothing to do with her. She's poisoned you all."

## **Part 2 – Who's The Traitor**

## Chapter 7

Marcus turned to his wife. He loved her dearly and knew she didn't understand. However, as a Vitrian elder, it was his duty to go help those in need, and Sofia would not understand. Especially when Celina was involved.

"Sofia," Marcus said gently, "you know I have to help anyone in need. I'll get you to safety and go to the others. If you were in Celina's shoes and I was not home, wouldn't you want Xavier or Alexis or Bathe to show up and help? Tell me honestly; how would you feel?"

"Then let Alexis help her! After all, he's her husband."

"You know Alexis is in London."

"Can't you see everything happening is linked to Celina?" Sofia sighed. "Celina is the one behind everything: Zacharie's problems as the medical and spiritual head of the Vitrians, Alexis' decision-making problems, Bathe's and Luciana's marriage problems . . ."

"Sofia, not now!" Marcus shouted.

"Not now?" Sofia stared at him. "You just told me you're dropping us off and going to Celina, and

you expect me to be quiet about that? It's either me, Marcus, or—..." His phone rang loudly, cutting her off. It continued to ring until Sofia picked it up.

"Who is it?" Marcus asked as Sofia gazed at it.

"Xavier," Sofia said, calmer now.

"Put it on speaker, please," Marcus said.

"Marcs! Marcs!" Xavier's deep voice sounded distressed as he called his friend by the teenage nickname.

"I am here, Xavier," Marcus said loudly.

"Oh, thank goodness. Where are Sofia and Wanda?"

"They're with me," Marcus said. "We were attacked earlier and just left the house."

"You were attacked?" Xavier repeated. "Alexis just called me. He sounded confused and disoriented."

"What do you mean? It's not like Alexis to be confused."

"Yes, I know. He's looking for Celina, said he got a call from Celina that Adrian is dead. That someone attacked him in their house."

"What!" Sofia gasped. "Who would do that? Bathe?"

"No." Marcus shook his head. "You and I know Bathe would never do that to her."

"No. That is beyond Bathe," Xavier agreed, but he didn't sound so sure.

"Where are you going? Where are you taking Sofia and Wanda?"

Marcus turned to his wife. They looked at each other for a few seconds, and she nodded. She knew what was on his mind.

"I'll call you later; there's a bit of urgency here. Call Luciana and check on Bathe. Sofia and I will look for Celina."

"Okay, good." Xavier hung up.

"You didn't tell him where you're taking us," Sofia said. "I'm guessing you don't want to reveal that. I know that look on your face. You're not sure who to trust."

"No, I didn't tell him." Marcus answered gently but didn't look at his wife.

"Xavier and Bathe are your best friends."

"Yes, I know, but the situation calls for prudence. I don't know what's happening or why demons are targeting Vitrians now. I can't reveal your safe place to anyone, and I can't take you and Wanda where I'm going; it won't be safe. Even if Xavier is not the one behind all this, he might mistakenly pass the message of your location to the wrong person."

"Do you think Bathe would do such a thing—I mean, harm Adrian?"

"No, Bathe would never do that." Marcus continued to speed toward the safe place. "Although I



know Bathe's relationship with Celina has been rather complicated lately, Bathe would never hurt a child."

He sensed the change in Sofia's demeanor. He drove a few more seconds and then continued.

"You know, it would make me feel so much better if you could just trust that I am looking out for you and Wanda."

"I'm sorry," Sofia said quietly. "I'm just shocked that we're under attack, and my brain can't stop buzzing about who might be behind all this. It has to be someone who knows us all really well, someone who knows where we live."

## Chapter 8

Marcus and Sofia drove for a few more minutes in silence. Marcus' foot remained down on the accelerator, pushing the car to the highest possible speed, making sure they were as far from his house as possible. Wanda had stopped crying and was now fast asleep in her car seat.

"I still think Bathe is behind this," Sofia blurted out.

Marcus shrugged and remained focused on the road; however, the unknown identity of the attacker on the Vitrian families disturbed him.

"Why? Why do you think it's Bathe?"

"Bathe has been acting funny lately," Sofia said. "He complains about Luciana and their son and then speaks about Celina like she's an angel."

Marcus took in a deep breath, not particularly interested in bringing Celina into their discussion again, but he knew in his heart that Sofia was right. Bathe had been acting erratically and annoyed concerning Celina and her husband, Alexis.

"Also, I don't understand how Bathe could have married Celina—" Sofia said.

"Sofia!" Marcus interrupted. "Celina and Bathe was just a childhood thing. It should never have happened. It was not a real marriage."

"Yes, but you've said it yourself before: you're not sure if they got a proper annulment before Bathe married Luciana."

"Well." Marcus chose his words carefully, knowing the discussion could quickly turn into a debate about him and Celina. "As I've also said before, Bathe and Celina were teenagers when that marriage took place."

"They're still together." Sofia sounded sure of what she was saying.

"You don't understand the Vitrian ways."

"What ways?"

"Celina is unique! She's gifted, especially at drawing people together." He paused. "It was a gift that Zacharie's father, Claudios, had. It should have been passed to Zacharie but went to Celina."

"Are you saying that's why all of you are close to Celina?" Sofia asked, a hint of jealousy in her voice.

"I can't say for sure that's the reason, but Celina is the most gifted among us—her gift is unique."

"Whatever gifts she has, she has caused more problems with it than not," Sofia said. "Celina's been scaring the entire community saying someone will

come for the Chosen children and their families. She's only doing it to draw the men to her."

"But isn't that what happened with the attacks today?" Marcus said. "None of us believed Celina and Zacharie. Don't today's events make their visions real?"

"Well, maybe, but that doesn't mean Bathe isn't a part of these attacks."

"I'm surprised you don't include me in your suspicions," Marcus said.

Sofia's lips twitched. "I know you; you wouldn't do this. You wouldn't attack anyone."

Who might be involved in this? Could it be someone they knew among the Vitrians, or a random stranger who decided to attack? He didn't understand it all, but he determined to get to the bottom of the mystery.

## Chapter 9

Silence lingered in the car as Marcus pondered; he didn't believe Bathe was involved in this. But he knew Bathe had been bitter about Celina's and Alexis' marriage for some time. His phone rang again, interrupting his thoughts. Sofia picked the phone up.

"Who is it?" Marcus asked, turning toward her.

"It's Alexis! Isn't he in England?"

"Yes, he is. That's his UK number," Marcus said. "Please answer it." The phone speakers came up in the car system.

"Hi, Alexis," Marcus said.

"Marcus! Marcus!" Alexis' words came out in a rush.

"I can hear you, my friend," Marcus replied.

"I've been trying to reach you for almost an hour!" Alexis said.

"How is the meeting going over there in London?" Marcus tried not to show any panic.

"London . . ." Alexis paused as if London was the last thing on his mind. "Celina called me saying there was trouble at our winter house. She said she

needed to get Adrian out of the house, that she thought his life was in danger. She said someone was in the house with her. And now I can't reach her! She's not answering!"

"Yes," Marcus replied, realizing Celina had already told him. "I'm on my way; I should see her very soon."

"Please keep my wife and son safe," Alexis said, his deep voice drenched in anxiety.

"I will, Alexis. I'll do my best," Marcus said, and the line went dead.

"I've never heard Alexis sound so worried," Sofia said. "He's the head of the Vitrians in the Scandinavian region. He's usually so full of courage . . ."

Marcus looked straight ahead, trying to hide his concern. Vitrians were strong and focused, dedicated to prayer and vanquishing demons from the earth. If Alexis was disturbed, Marcus should be also.

"This is his wife and son we're talking about," Marcus said. "We should cut him some slack."

"Why did he allow her to go to their winter house alone when he knew he would be in London this week?"

"He wanted her to get some rest. I didn't like it either, but Bathe and the other leaders supported it. They said it was good for her to get away from other Vitrians for awhile." Marcus especially remembered

how vigorous Bathe had been in support of Celina's decision to go to the winter home alone.

"Why the sudden silence?" Sofia looked at him.

"Bathe was very vocal during the discussion about Celina; he pushed to allow her to stay in the mountains. He said her visions and constant talk about children being attacked was disturbing a lot of families." Marcus turned and gazed into his wife's eyes.

"Bathe? Oh, no!" Sofia said. "Call him."

"I told Xavier to do that already."

"No! You call him! Is he with Celina right now?"

Marcus pointed to the phone on the console between him and his wife. "Make the call, please." He couldn't accept Bathe being behind the attacks. Bathe was his best man and long-time friend. Bathe would not do such a repugnant thing.

## Chapter 10

Sofia scrolled through the contact list on Marcus' mobile phone, searching for Bathe's name. The wind continued to blow hard as they drove, but Marcus didn't reduce his speed.

"Can't you find the number?" Marcus said. "It's saved under his—"

"Found it!" Sofia said. She pressed the call button and made sure the call was connected to the car. The phone rang with no response.

"Maybe Bathe and Luciana are asleep?" Sofia said.

"A moment ago, you believed Bathe was with Celina. Now you think he's home sleeping?"

She shrugged. "It's four in the morning." She tapped the time displayed in the car.

"Bathe is a light sleeper and gets up early to pray. I've known Bathe for decades. I know him too well, even his daily routine. He always picks up his call, no matter the time of the day, and he should be up now, praying—"



"Hello?" Marcus heard from the other end of the phone. He looked at the name displayed on the car dashboard in confusion. "Bathe, is that you? You sound like Alexis."

"Yes, it's me," Bathe said, panting.

Marcus felt confused for some minutes. Bathe's voice sounded like it was Alexis on the phone and it got Marcus confused.

"Why do you sound like Alexis? Are you outside walking?" Marcus said, his tone suddenly abrasive.

Silence followed, and then the call disconnected. Marcus looked at Sofia, and he knew she was thinking the same as him.

"I thought I heard Alexis' voice too," she said. "Recheck the name. Are you sure you called Bathe and not Alexis?"

"Yes, it was Bathe I called." Sofia turned the mobile toward her husband. "Why is he outside in the cold at four in the morning?"

"I don't know." Marcus replied. "It doesn't add up."

"Do you think he might be with Celina? You don't think he would hurt Adrian, do you?"

"Bathe would never hurt Celina!" he replied. "Or Adrian."

"But you've several times not liked the way Bathe looked at Adrian and Alexis."

Marcus fell silent.

"You said Bathe believes he would have treated Celina better if—"

"Sofia." Marcus turned toward her. "Granted, Bathe doesn't like Alexis, but that doesn't make him a killer. I know him; he didn't do this."

"Well, I think you're wrong. Why don't we call Bathe again and ask him where he is and where he's been?" She crossed her arms over her chest. "You see so much good in everyone, Marcus. But not everyone is good."

## Chapter 11

Sofia knew Marcus was not yet convinced Bathe was behind all the attacks. Marcus, Xavier, and Bathe were like brothers when they were younger. They did a lot together, as if they were the three musketeers of the Vitrian community in Norway.

"Sofia!" Marcus said. "Maybe they've been attacked also. Maybe he's on the road trying to get away."

"And he hasn't called you or Xavier, his close friends, to ask for help? I think you should call him." She raised the phone, and Marcus slowed the car.

"We're here now," he said, pointing with one hand while holding onto the steering wheel with his other. "You see that church building? You need to step into the compound."

"I remember," Sofia replied. "You've shown me the place several times. It's a safe hideaway from demons. But the fence and gate are rather low." They drove past the low, four-foot fence of the compound.

"It is not the height of the fence that protects you, but the prayers made to consecrate the area and

the Praying Méndez buried around the vicinity. Once the buried Praying Méndez are placed, the location becomes a consecrated land. No demon can come near or even see the place."

"Y-e-s," she said. Didn't he notice how angry she was? "This is one of the sanctified locations of the Vitrians, and no demon will see or come near me once I step into the compound. I know."

She fixed her gaze on her husband and realized he was avoiding her gaze.

"The building is lit and warm. In the basement, you'll find bedding, toiletries, all you need for you and Wanda to get comfortable and rest."

"I don't want you to go." Sofia shook her head. "What if you never come back? What if it's all true, but the demons you meet are too difficult for you to handle?"

"Sofia." She could see he was trying to be calm, but she was determined not to make it easy for him. "I need to help Celina. Alexis went to London on behalf of the Vitrians, and his wife is now in danger. I can't just leave Celina helpless and stay here with you and Wanda; neither can I take you guys with me. There is no demon I can't handle. You know that."

"You're really going to Celina? You would leave your own family?" Her voice went an octave higher. "What has she done to you all? She has you under her control, under her spell." Sofia opened the door and

stepped out. She picked up Wanda from the back seat and held on tightly. The winter jacket hung over one shoulder. Sofia slammed the door shut before Marcus could say another word and stepped toward the gate. At least now he knew she was angry.

Marcus closed his eyes tight.

Sofia could see that she was getting to him. She wanted him to know that she didn't like being left alone at such a time. She was not a Vitrian, and she hadn't bargained for such a moment.

"You need to get into the building."

"Yes." She turned her face away, so he knew she didn't want to talk to him. "And you need to get going to your Celina."

"I am doing the right thing, Sofia." Marcus said. But Sofia still didn't look at him. He pulled the car back onto the motorway and skidded off.

Sofia took a deep breath and closed her eyes; she hated herself for reacting like that. She knew her husband, being a Vitrian leader, had to help others in danger. But she was jealous, mostly because it was Celina he was going to help.

She still stood in front of the gate when she sensed something close to her. She turned to the left as a creature descended. A Night Furfur, almost twice the size of the others that had been sent previously. There was no way the beast could have just come from nowhere to find them there. She knew from the little

training she had been given by the Vitrians that the Night Furfur must have followed them from their house.

The Night Furfur landed, and immediately, Sofia knew it would take a miracle for her to survive. The creature stood over nine feet. One strike of its huge talon was enough to kill any human. And Sofia was not trained on how to fight it.

## **Part 3 – Sofia Attacked**

## Chapter 12

Immediately after Marcus dropped Sofia and Wanda off, he sped away with the car. Everything concerned him; Celina's claim that Adrian was dead, Xavier stating he had been called by other Vitrians who had been attacked, and Bathe . . . he paused, not knowing what was going on with Bathe.

"What are you doing, Baths?" Marcus said aloud. "Where are you?" He dialed Bathe's number. He didn't expect Bathe to answer, but then he heard Bathe's voice on the other end.

"What is it?" Bathe sounded abrasive, like he was ready to pick a fight.

"Where are you, Baths?"

"Why? I'm taking a walk."

"A walk! Why are you taking a walk so early in the morning?"

"I don't want to talk about it now."

"No, Bathe, we need to talk about it. And—"

"Marcus!" Anger riddled Bathe's voice. "Whatever Luciana might have said to you, I don't want to hear it right now."



"Luciana?" Marcus blinked. "I haven't spoken to Luciana, but I have spoken to Xavier. Didn't Xavier call you?"

"No—oh, yes, he did. I didn't pick up."

"Why?" Marcus asked. "Why wouldn't you pick up Xavier's call?"

"I don't have the time right now, Marcus." Bathe sounded irritated. "I'm busy."

"Baths. Vitrians are under attack. A Furfur came for Wanda."

Bathe went silent for a moment and then spoke. "Where is Wanda now?"

No sign of surprise that demons had attacked them at home. Why did his best friend only ask for the location of his daughter? Did Bathe really have something to do with the attacks?

"Where is Wanda?" Bathe's voice intensified.

"Wanda is okay—"

"Are you at home? I'll come over."

His sudden interest shocked Marcus. A demon could only find the specific person it had been sent to track, and the first place to check was usually the person's home. While he still didn't want to believe his best friend was guilty of any sorcery, he knew it was not safe to disclose the location of Sofia and Wanda.

"No, don't worry, we're not home. I need . . . I mean, Sofia, Wanda, and I need to get to Celina. She was attacked too. Did you see Celina today?" Silence

greeted him. Marcus pressed onward. "Baths . . . Baths, are you there?"

## Chapter 13

The silence on the phone continued. It made Marcus more concerned that his best friend might be linked to all the attacks. Yet he did not accept the heavy knock on his mind that Sofia might be right.

“Bathe! Bathe, are you there?”

“Celina—okay.” Bathe spoke softly. He didn't sound concerned. “What about her?”

“Ohh-kay. Have you been to Celina's, Bathe?”

Bathe must have been with Celina at her winter home. He must know more about the attacks than he was letting on. He probably just left Celina and was on his way back to his house.

The silence lingered so long, Marcus thought Bathe had hung up.

“Baths,” Marcus said. “Are you still there?”

“I need to go, Marcus,” Bathe suddenly said. His tone sounded venomous; he seemed enraged for some reason. “I'm home now; I need to check on Luciana and Haakon.”

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Bathe cut off the call and stood at the entrance of his house. His grip on the phone tightened in anger. Celina's name reverberated in his head. After a moment of deep thinking, he tried opening the front door. Locked. He searched for his key. He'd left home in a hurry, angry after Luciana threatened him with separation and divorce. *Bam! Bam! Bam!*

Bathe banged on the door and waited, but no one came. He tried the door handle again and pushed the door, but it was definitely locked.

He was about to bang on the door again when his phone rang. He looked at it and saw Xavier's number. Xavier was either calling because of his fight with Luciana or because of the attack Marcus spoke of. Whichever the case, Bathe wasn't interested. He ignored the call and banged on the door again, this time harder, determined to wake up his wife. Finally, the door swung open. Luciana was dressed with their little boy in her arms as if about to leave. He knew it was just past four in the morning, Bathe's eyes twitched, wondering where they were going to so early, but anger and pride would not let him ask. He didn't want to talk to her. A part of him felt okay with separation; Luciana splitting up the marriage was a logical decision. it would make his plans and desires for Celina work very well.

## Chapter 14

Sofia swallowed hard. Her entire body shivered at the sight of the massive Night Furfur in front of her. She wanted to scream, but she restrained herself. She might not have been born a Vitrian, but she knew demons fed on fear, and she needed to exercise courage right now.

She stepped back, watching the reddened eyes of the demon. The Furfur launched, closing the gap between them. She turned and rushed to the gate.

The Furfur's talons dug into her back as the Furfur caught her before she got there. Sofia screamed.

The Night Furfur flapped its broad and enormous wings and pulled toward the sky. Sofia's body lifted ten feet above the ground. Fear set in, nesting in her like a bird finding a home. Her body tilted because she only had her right arm in her jacket. She hadn't properly put it on when she stepped out of Marcus' car. She swayed, and she felt she was about to fall as the Night Furfur pulled her higher up into the sky. She held on tight to little Wanda, still in her arms but stirring after her mother's scream.

She couldn't let the creature take her away. She looked down at the wall around the church compound; all she needed to do was get herself into it.

They were directly above it now. She slipped her right arm out of the jacket and fell from the Furfur's grip. Her ankle snapped beneath her as her right foot touched the ground at the same time her back landed on the red, interlocking bricks of the four feet wall, bones crunching as they slammed against the unforgiving cement. Her lower body and legs were outside the compound. She tried to push herself up and into the compound but rather her body fell back, she found herself just sitting her back on the short fence. She was yet exposed and very visible to the creature.

"Ahhhhhhh! Ah!" Sofia hollered in agony. Tears ran down her face from the excruciating pain in her ankle and back.

She had protected her daughter with her body, but the little girl in her arms was now crying.

The Furfur landed on the ground a few meters in front of her, the winter jacket still stuck in its foot. With her lower body and legs still outside the compound, the creature could see her.

"No. You shall not get my daughter nor me!" Sofia shouted. She had to get rid of the overwhelming fear. Her husband had taught her well; he had said to her several times, "To face a demon, you have to get

the fear in you out. You have to fill yourself with courage.”

Pain lanced through her back when she swiveled her body. She squirmed, trying to force herself to get up and go over the wall, but her body did not respond. The pain from her right ankle was excruciating. The Furfur's talons had dug into her back while pulling her up into the sky, tearing flesh and muscle. If the wound wasn't treated quickly, she wouldn't make it. She tried to pull her body up again, but it was to no avail; her back and ankle both hurt gravely.

The Furfur made a satisfied sound. It knew Sofia and Wanda were at its mercy. It charged forward, mouth wide open and three-inch long fangs exposed in full length. Its head went straight for the kill: toward Wanda.

## Chapter 15

Sofia mustered all the strength she could. She groaned, pulling herself together and raising Wanda up in her arms. She rolled her daughter above the wall to the other side. Little Wanda dropped to the other side of the fence, crying as her little body touched the ground.

In that instant, Wanda disappeared from the sight of the Night Furfur. The demon stopped its sudden rush. It shook its head left and right, and then took two steps back.

The Furfur moved on Sofia, but she wasn't afraid anymore. The demon wanted Wanda, but now it wouldn't get Wanda. It looked down at Sofia, and their eyes met.

This time, Sofia managed a smile, though she was breathing hard from the pain.

"You shall not get my daughter," Sofia said. Marcus' words were true; the compound was sealed with the Vitrians' praying powers, and no demon could see inside, nor go through the walls.



The creature pressed its talons, with the jacket still stuck on them, into Sofia's shoulder. It dragged Sofia to the top of the wall, and Sofia screamed. The Furfur made unintelligible sounds, but Sofia could guess what it wanted. It wanted Sofia to grab Wanda and pull her out of the compound.

Sofia screeched in pain. Wanda let out a loud cry. Wanda was alive, even though she might have been hurt from the fall.

"Never!" Sofia said. "I would rather die than give my daughter to you."

The Furfur made the sounds again and pressed its talons deeper into Sofia's shoulder as she lay on the edge of the wall.

"Not even in death will I hand her over to you." Sofia was full of confidence in spite of the excruciating pain she felt. She might not survive, but her child would.

The jacket covered Sofia's body as the Furfur pressed its talons into her shoulder and lifted its leg. Sofia's body followed the claws, dropping outside of the compound as the claws slid out. The talons came toward her again, and this time they went for her neck.

## THE END!!!

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